

BOOK REVIEW

CHINESE THOUGHT IN A MULTI-CULTURAL WORLD

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YUE Daiyun. *Chinese Thought in a Multi-cultural World: Cross-Cultural Communication, Comparative Literature and Beyond*. Routledge, 2023, 203 pp. ISBN: 9781032410975.

Abstract: Yue Daiyun's *Chinese Thought in a Multi-cultural World: Cross-Cultural Communication, Comparative Literature and Beyond* offers a compelling response to contemporary global concerns. This translated work, originally written in Chinese, presents both Chinese and global perspectives aimed at reconstructing a world oriented toward mutual understanding rather than self-interest. It serves as an excellent introduction to the Chinese approach to comparative literature, bridging Eastern and Western viewpoints.

Keywords: *Chinese Thought, Cross-Cultural Communication, Comparative Literature, Lu Xun, Wang Guowei.*

In today's world, self-interest and individualism dominate, with an increasing focus on material consumption, personal happiness, and human-centrism. While some live in luxury, others struggle for basic survival. Economists often equate happiness with wealth accumulation, reinforcing a culture of selfish pursuits at the expense of common well-being. The rise of modern science and

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the ideology of modernity have further deepened this trend, leading to widespread political oppression, abuse of power, and social marginalization. Western models of civilization, imposed globally, have transformed the world under the guise of progress, often masking a new form of barbarity. These challenges – moral decay, economic disparity and cultural homogenization – raise pressing questions: Can we make the world a better place? Is there an alternative to this profit-driven, human-centric system?

Yue Daiyun's *Chinese Thought in a Multi-cultural World* confronts these urgent issues. Comprising sixteen chapters, the book begins by critically examining Western individualism and its globalizing tendencies. Daiyun challenges dominant narratives – particularly those stemming from the US – in politics, economics and ideology, and explores counter-theories such as the clash of civilizations, postmodernity and global resistance movements.

In the opening chapters, Yue Daiyun addresses the pressing challenges of the contemporary world and critiques the dominance of Western influence. She argues that the West must move beyond its unilateral perspective and engage in genuine integration with Eastern thought – particularly the Chinese worldview – through multi-directional, multidimensional, and interactive understanding (20). According to Daiyun, the Chinese conception of humanity fundamentally differs from the Western view. While Western thought tends to emphasize individualism, Chinese traditions – especially Confucianism – portray human beings as relational and world-oriented, placing a strong emphasis on harmony between humanity and nature. This relational framework fosters unity and collective well-being, contrasting sharply with the self-centered tendencies often associated with postmodern Western contexts. Again, Daiyun highlights the global crises of the twenty-first century and proposes that a “neo-humanity” rooted in traditional Chinese culture offers a path toward moral refinement and spiritual renewal for building a better world (27–28). She suggests that embracing this cultural foundation can contribute to transforming the global order. Moreover, the book emphasizes the potential of literary scholarship to navigate an ever-changing world.

Comparative and global literature, Daiyun argues, can play a vital role in reimagining and reconstructing the present system into one that aspires toward an ideal, inclusive, and harmonious future (35).

In the subsequent chapters—before elaborating on how a caretaking world can be constructed through Chinese philosophical perspectives to promote the good—Daiyun introduces Jeremy Rifkin’s insights to explore the complex cultural dynamics between America and Europe. She contrasts the two by noting that American culture tends to prioritize limitless material gain, often at the expense of others, while European traditions are more spiritually inclined and socially conscious. Though these civilizations evolved through different historical trajectories, Daiyun critiques America’s political theology, arguing that it has become a global nightmare driven by self-interest and dominance (38–40). In contrast, the European vision, despite its limitations, holds greater promise—emphasizing equality, human dignity, and spiritual depth. Daiyun envisions a shared effort between Europe and China to resist oppressive power structures and work toward a new world order—one grounded in justice, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence rather than consumerism and material excess (48–49).

Again, Yue Daiyun introduces a fresh approach to comparative literature by emphasizing the centrality of human concerns over material or ideological interests. She argues that comparative literature, grounded in cultural diversity, has the potential to reshape global spirituality and promote a more humane world (57). Daiyun thus revisits historical experiences, particularly from the missionary perspective in China, to critique past global encounters. She argues that the goal of dialogue today should not be the assimilation or fusion of ideas, but rather the respectful sharing and negotiation of differences. For Daiyun, constructing a new world demands embracing multipolarity, recognizing cultural distinctions, and fostering coexistence through diversity (78–79). She criticizes Western European missionaries for their failure to understand and appreciate the principles of coexistence, mutual respect, and cultural learning.

Rediscovering oneself through the eyes of others can enable

individuals and cultures to become a source of support and solidarity for one another (86-87). Daiyun highlights the importance of cultural consciousness from the Chinese perspective, emphasizing its rich traditional resources as a guide for global engagement. She clearly states that China's role in global development is not to impose its culture, but to follow a code of conduct centered on solidarity, moral example, and mutual respect: "Chinese culture follows its valued code of conduct, which prioritizes building solidarity with others and winning people over by virtuous deeds" (89).

Historically, China has practiced the ideal of "harmony without homogeneity"—valuing difference while promoting unity (90). In contrast to the Western model of civilizational imposition and dominance, Chinese culture is deeply rooted in its historical ethos of mutual respect and cultural strengthening for collective well-being. Thus, comparative literature, when grounded in Chinese cultural values, offers a powerful tool for promoting multicultural exchange, resisting cultural homogenization, and countering the postmodern trends of fragmentation and self-centeredness (119).

While the promotion of Chinese culture within a multicultural framework appears justified from a global and historical-literary perspective, one might question whether such a projection risks replicating Western cultural hegemony. Yue Daiyun firmly rejects this concern. She contends that China's cultural outreach is fundamentally different—it is rooted in a long-standing tradition of intercultural literary exchange, particularly with civilizations like India, Persia, and Japan. The Chinese approach to global literary engagement aims to enrich cultural heritage rather than dominate it. Unlike Western tendencies toward assimilation or cultural fusion, China's literary exchange represents what Daiyun calls the "third phase" in the evolution of comparative literature. This phase moves beyond Western models such as Spivak's planetarity or Bassnett's earlier Euro-American frameworks, and instead promotes global multiculturalism based on mutual complementarity (122-123).

Ultimately, Daiyun envisions a new paradigm for comparative literature: one grounded in collaborative discourse

among diverse scholars writing on shared themes, attentive to the historical contexts and the reactions of global readers. Such intercultural circulation, she argues, can lay the foundation for a more inclusive and harmonious world (124).

In the final chapters (14, 15, and 16), Yue Daiyun highlights the contributions of key 20th-century Chinese scholars—Wang Guowei (1877–1927), Lu Xun (1881–1936), and Zhu Guangqian—to the development of comparative literature, particularly in bridging Chinese and Western traditions. Daiyun acknowledges Wang Guowei’s significant role in moving beyond dichotomies such as old versus new and China versus the West (155). Wang’s deep engagement with Western philosophy, especially the works of Schopenhauer, allowed him to explore the essence of literary production through immersion rather than superficial comparison (162).

Lu Xun, another central figure, emphasized the importance of integrating Western literary ideas to foster self-awareness and creativity in Chinese intellectual life. His comparative approach aimed at understanding both self and others, grounding China’s development in a progressive, evolutionary vision of cultural exchange (170–171). Daiyun notes that for Lu, comparative literature emerges not from foreign influence alone, but from the internal need for China to define and renew itself (180). Zhu Guangqian’s work adds another dimension by promoting a blended literary perspective. He advocated for expanding the scope of comparative literature to cultivate broader, more inclusive understandings of global literary traditions (185). Through Zhu’s lens, true literary comprehension involves openness rather than judgment, seeking depth through integration of Western theory and Chinese aesthetic thought.

Daiyun’s analysis of these thinkers highlights how comparative literature, rooted in both Chinese heritage and Western theory, serves as a dynamic field for mutual enrichment. This integrated approach, she argues, offers a valuable framework for global literary and cultural development (194).

The entire book offers profound insights into the evolving field of comparative literature, presenting a developmental model that emphasizes complementarity over universalism. Yue

Daiyun's constructive approach invites readers to broaden their understanding through engagement with diverse cultural experiences. This bidirectional exchange – between East and West and vice versa – cultivates empathy and enriches the comparative literary discourse. China's constructive role in facilitating East-West integration stands out as a significant contribution to this field. Yet, from an educational standpoint, one might ask how this comparative literary framework could be meaningfully incorporated into university curricula, particularly for children and young adults. Daiyun rightly critiques the erosion of children's imaginative capacities due to the saturation of visual media and animated content (63), highlighting the need to restore creativity through literature. However, more focus on holistic or whole-person education from a comparative literary lens, especially tailored to younger generations, would enhance the scope of this work.

While the book offers rich discussions in literature, art, philosophy, and poetics, it gives little attention to feminist perspectives. The inclusion of ecofeminist and ecopoetic frameworks – drawing from both Chinese and Western traditions – could have added further depth to the comparative analysis. Moreover, although Daiyun navigates a wide array of themes such as modernity, postmodernity, technological change, poverty, and war, the book falls short of proposing concrete, practical solutions to these societal challenges. Despite these limitations, the volume remains an invaluable resource for researchers, scholars, translators, cultural theorists, and anyone interested in Chinese traditional literature and its dialogue with global cultures. It provides a meaningful contribution to understanding the dynamic interplay between East and West in shaping a more empathetic and pluralistic literary world.